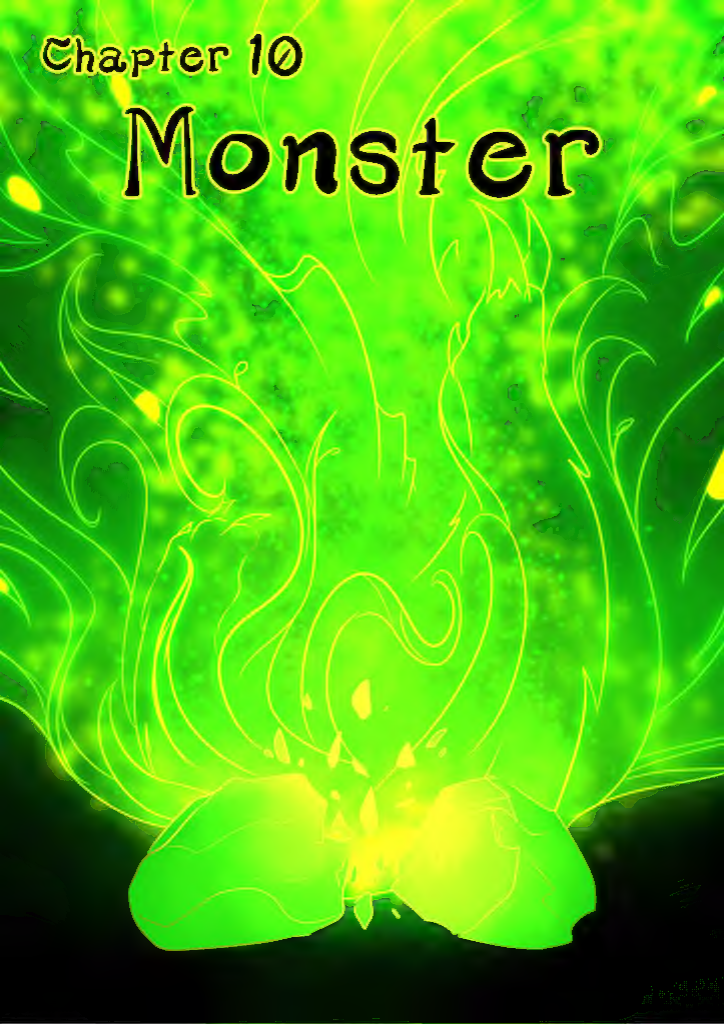
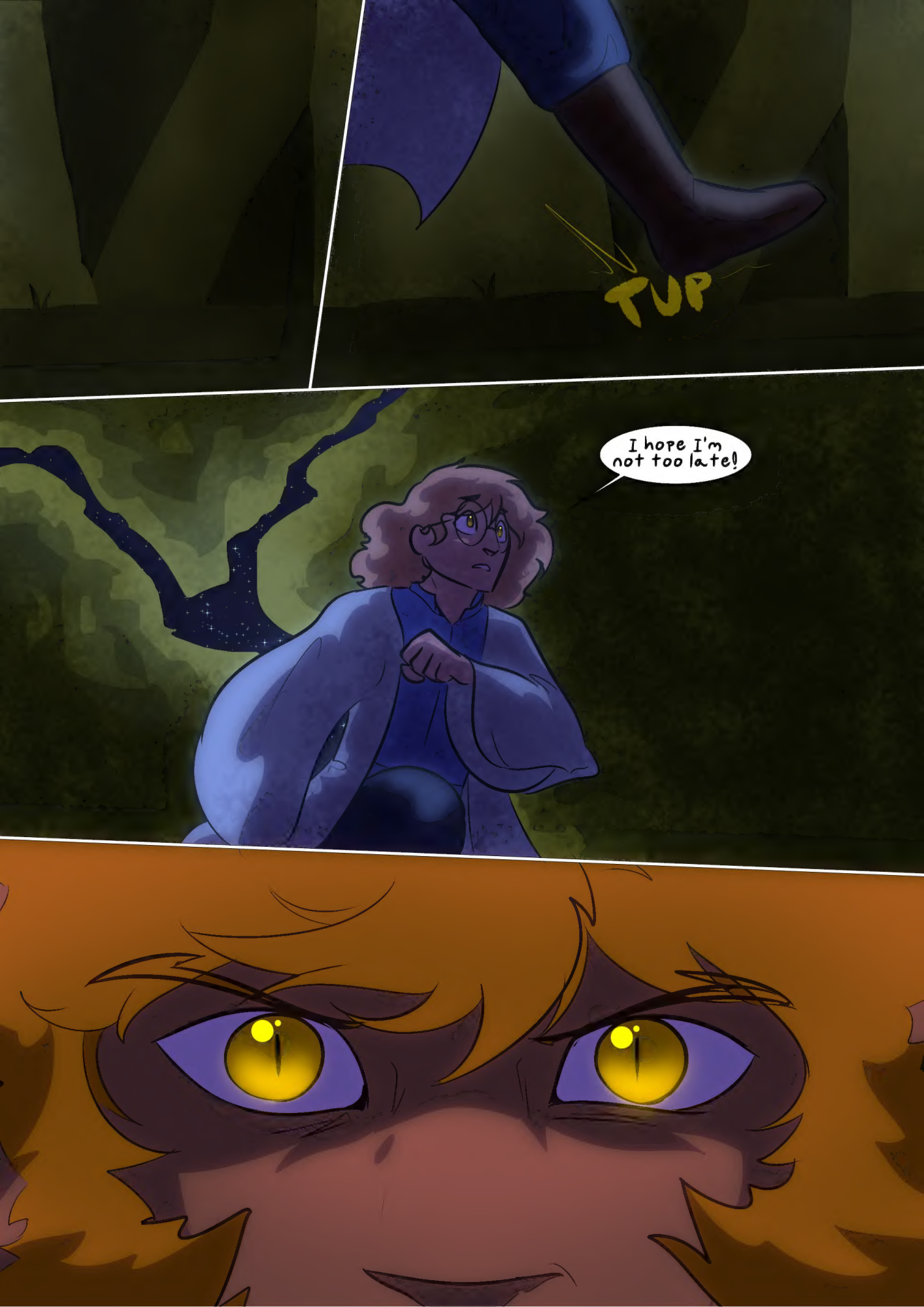
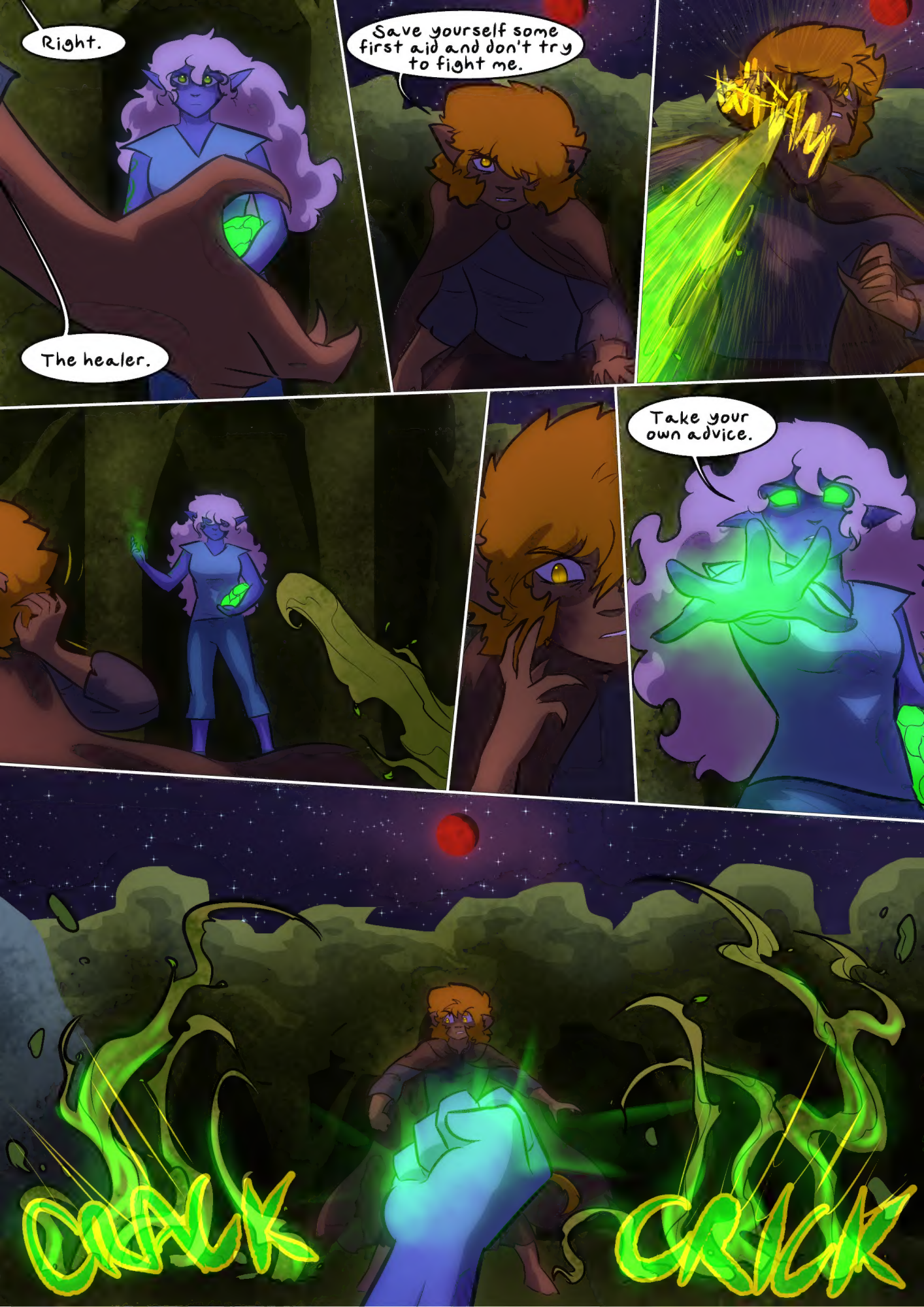
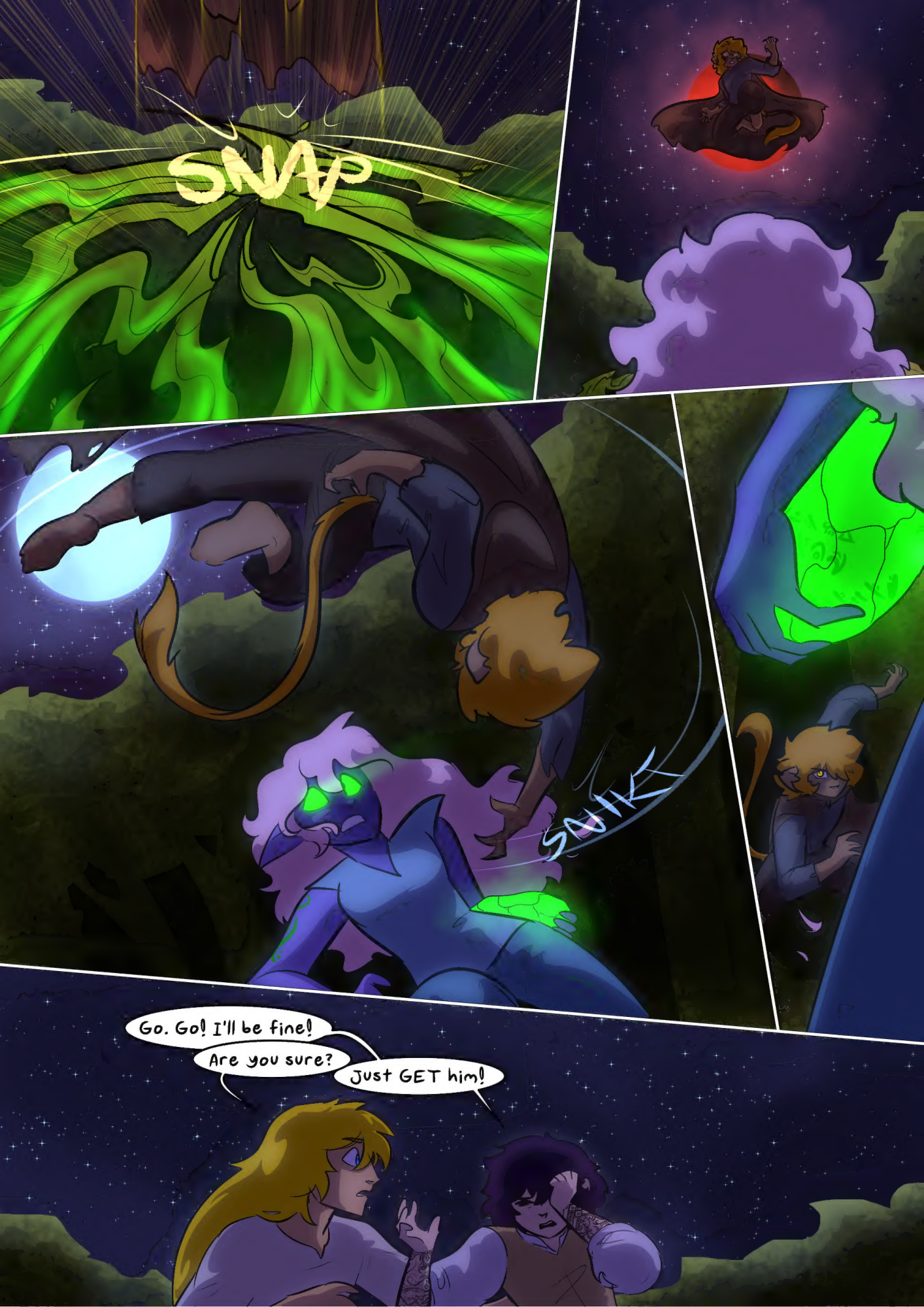
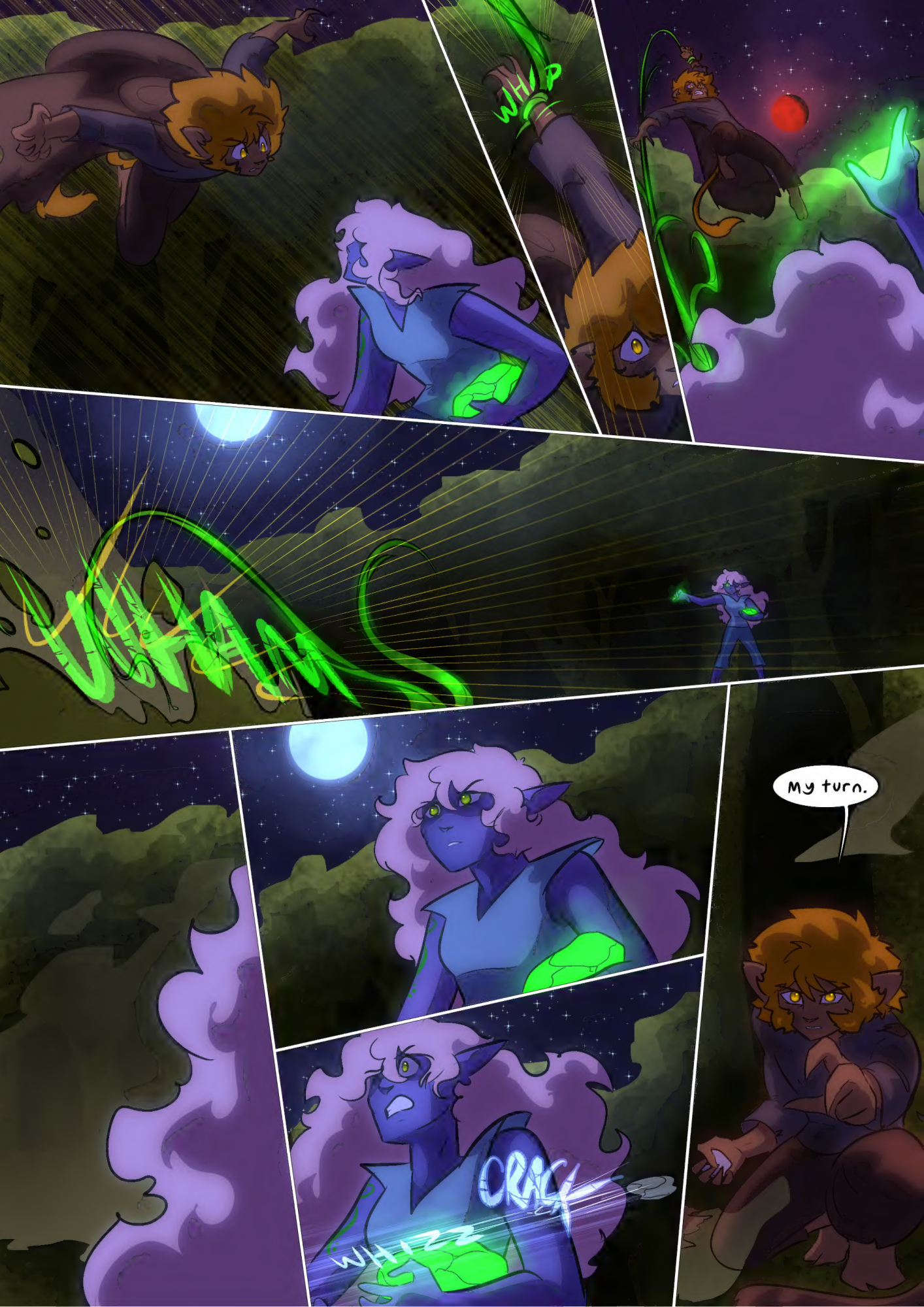
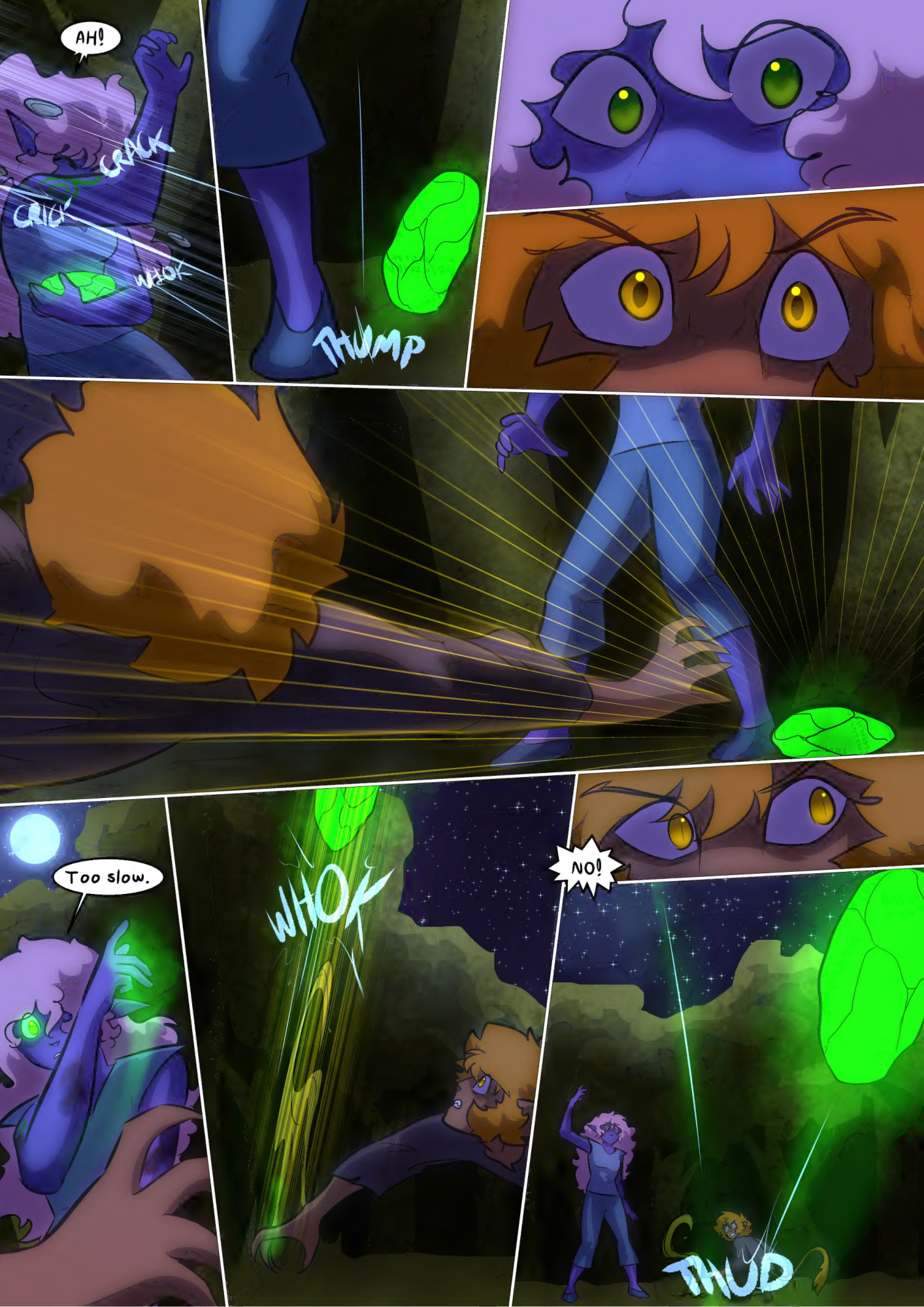

Chapter 10
Monster


TUP
I hope I'm not too late!


Right.
The healer.
Save yourself some first aid and don't try to fight me.
Take your own advice.
CRAK
CRICK


SNAP
SQUIK
Go. Go! I'll be fine!
Are you sure?
Just GET him!

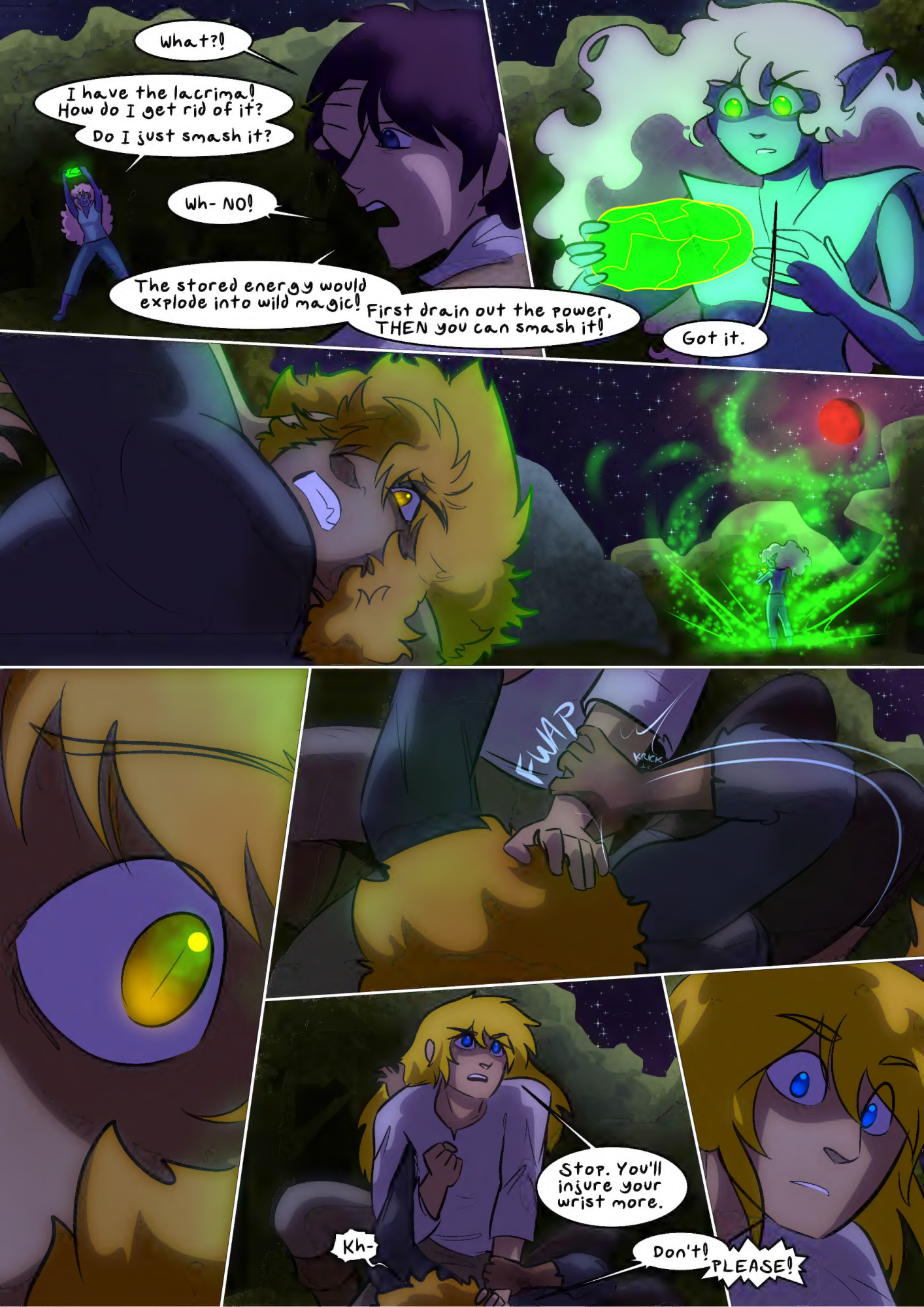

WHIP
WHAM
My turn.
WHIZZ
CRACK


AH!
CRACK
CRICK
WHOK
THUMP
Too slow.
WHOK
NO!
THUD

Fine.
FINE!
You wanna make this about you?
Then I'll deal with you first!
WHAP
Kendal! I can handle-
The crystal.
It's an unstable mass of life magic. You're the best person to destroy it.
Let me deal with this.

But he-!
Fine.
No!
NO!
I have had ENOUGH OF
Stop.
CRACK

Gnh!!
THUD
WHAP
SHFF
Erin!


What?!
I have the lacrima! How do I get rid of it?
Do I just smash it?
Wh- NO!
The stored energy would explode into wild magic!
First drain out the power, THEN you can smash it!
Got it.
FWAP
KRICK
Stop. You'll injure your wrist more.
Kh-
Don't! PLEASE!

It doesn't even mean anything to you!
We can't leave it. It's too dangerous.
I don't CARE!
It's my only chance to be HUMAN!
SHFF
gnh!
WHAT?!

To... to be human?
...I don't expect YOU to understand.
You already have everything I want, and it's still not enough for you.
Life magic can change people. Why shouldn't it change me?
But-
You didn't make the chimera?!
The...
...the bear thing?
Are you KIDDING?!
Why would I WASTE it on something like THAT?!
I don't know how much power that thing has, and I can't recharge it! This might be the only chance I ever GET!
Oh no.
Ohhhhh no. I thought - I shouldn't have --
I'm really sorry about this let me just fix that for you
I - hey!
...I'm confused.

WHAP
HUAGH
Not as confused as ME!
What in the WORLD made you think that was a good idea?!
How is THAT what's upsetting you?!
We were fighting TEN SECONDS AGO!
Life-based bodily alterations have to be done VERY slowly and carefully or they become chimerical mutations!
Even then, an extreme change like this could cause long-term mental damage or soul degradation!
You can't just steal a lacrima and hope everything works out!
I KNOW that!
Why do you think I stole your BOOKS?
What?
I don't know anything about magic, but I know how to read.
It's a book about using life magic safely - it OBVIOUSLY has spells for fixing mutations!
I just need to find the ones that'll fix the mutations I was BORN with!
That... is actually not a terrible plan.
I mean, it obviously wouldn't WORK, but-
WHAT?!
Wait.

You didn't know anything about magic before this?
How did you know to steal the lacrima?
I knew a LITTLE about lacrimas.
Enough to blind the mage with one.
But this one I saw in action.
I knew there were weird animals in this forest, but I didn't know someone was actually MAKING them until I saw it in person.
That crystal turned a normal bear into something a lot bigger and meaner - and it wasn't too happy with me when I snagged the crystal and ran.
Who was using it?
Uh, Alinva, at this point I'm pretty sure-
Yes, I know, I'm ALSO pretty sure!
But this time I want to be COMPLETELY sure before I attack anyone!
Wait, what's going on? Are we fighting again?
Ah!!
You found him!
Oh dear.
You've been TALKING to him.

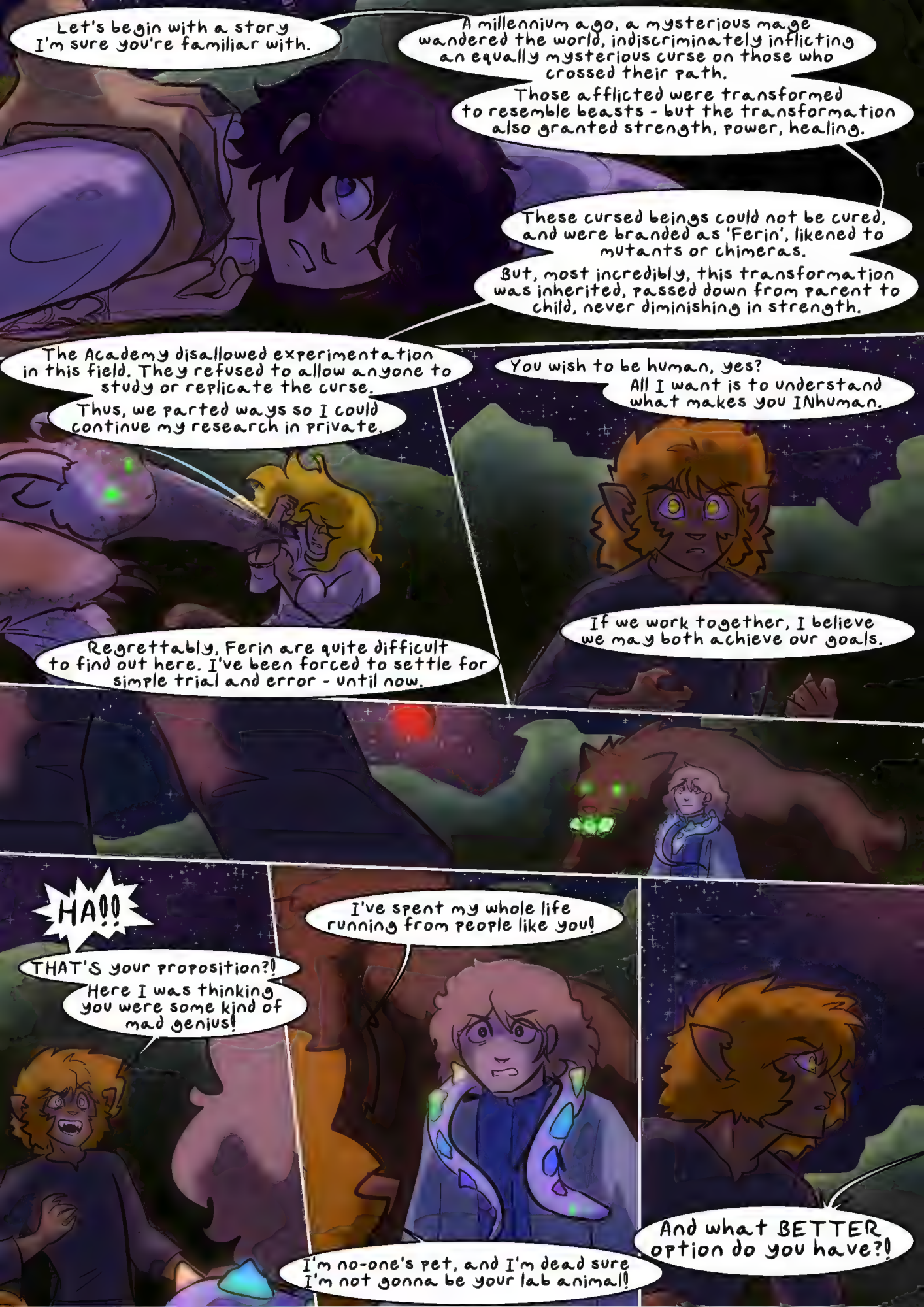
That's unfortunate.
If you'd played your parts, this could have been resolved simply and cleanly.
Now this is going to get complicated.
Complicated? You LIED to us!
You KNOW flesh-shaping is forbidden! You sent us after a scapegoat!
FOOSH
You-
Wh-
What's-?
Ah, you noticed so quickly! I should have known that title wasn't just for show.
Wild spelleaters never grow much larger than a hand, but they grow very readily when life magic is applied.
Shirii's appetite has grown to match her impressive size, and these days she consumes ambient elemental energy at a very impressive rate.
I can't keep her in my clinic, of course. She'd make it quite impossible to get any healing done.
But her talents are invaluable on the rare occasions I deal with other mages.

Now then, I've been-
oh!
But-
AH.
Of course.
!!
YOU.
Oh, goodness.
Galdr?

ALINUA!
CLOMP
What is your GOAL here?!
Terrorizing a town to play their hero?
What's the POINT of all this?!
Forgive the assumption -
But I suspect the Academy has been very indulgent with you.
WHAM

With your status, they can't afford to drive you away by limiting your activities.
The rest of us must follow their rules - or seek out more secluded locations to work.
The privacy is worth a few superstitious peasants.
Hm?
...Interesting.
Keep this one alive, Galdr. He might warrant further examination.
But do keep him busy.
We must stay focused on the task at hand.

She isn't healing...
Tch!
WHOOSH
Ahh, there we go.
Now we can finally talk.
Talk?
You're why these guys attacked me in the FIRST place!
Now, that's not true. I may have directed them to find you under vaguely false pretenses, but they decided to attack you on their own.
I just wanted the chance to talk to you face-to-face, and you don't exactly make that easy.
My poor chimeras were on your scent for SEFS without tracking you down.
But let's put all that behind us and do this correctly!
I'm Doctor Jolon. What's your name?
...Falst.
Falst! Lovely.
I have a proposition for you, Falst.


Let's begin with a story I'm sure you're familiar with.
A millennium ago, a mysterious mage wandered the world, indiscriminately inflicting an equally mysterious curse on those who crossed their path.
Those afflicted were transformed to resemble beasts - but the transformation also granted strength, power, healing.
These cursed beings could not be cured, and were branded as 'Ferin', likened to mutants or chimeras.
But, most incredibly, this transformation was inherited, passed down from parent to child, never diminishing in strength.
The Academy disallowed experimentation in this field. They refused to allow anyone to study or replicate the curse.
Thus, we parted ways so I could continue my research in private.
You wish to be human, yes?
All I want is to understand what makes you INhuman.
Regrettably, Ferin are quite difficult to find out here. I've been forced to settle for simple trial and error - until now.
If we work together, I believe we may both achieve our goals.
HA!!
THAT'S your proposition?!
Here I was thinking you were some kind of mad genius!
I've spent my whole life running from people like you!
I'm no-one's pet, and I'm dead sure I'm not gonna be your lab animal!
And what BETTER option do you have?!

You resorted to stolen magic because your life was intolerable, and yet you so casually reject my offer to free you from it?
Your amateurish plan betrays your ignorance. If a simple spell could permanently turn a ferin human, there would be no ferin left!
You hurt and steal to survive because you are unwanted, and your efforts are fruitless regardless.
I have devoted my life to unraveling the magics at play here. I am a master of my craft, and I generously offer you my aid!
You are a monster, hated and alone!
What future do you see for yourself that you are suddenly too proud to give up?
I-
It is a cruel trick of fate that you were born to be alone.
But I am willing to help you.
YOU'RE WRONG!
Nobody has to be alone!
Even if we aren't like them-
There's still a place for us in their world!

What an interesting theory.
Of course it would be easy for you to believe in the goodwill and acceptance of your fellows.
Who could look at you and see a monster?
You speak in flowery hypotheticals, but Falst and I understand the cruel reality.
Kindness is reserved for the privileged.
The world is a very different place for the monstrous and ugly.
Do you really believe that?
You really think everyone is faking their kindness?
I've known a hundred thousand mortal lifetimes. I've seen them spare compassion for people more monstrous than anyone here.
I've seen people like you, too.
Do you all justify your monstrosity by convincing yourselves that you're no worse than anyone else?
...Galdr.
Hk-!
WHAM
I think that's quite enough.
Believe whatever you want, but keep it out of my business
SHF

What-?!
SHIRII!
ah!
You INSOLENT-!
ZAP
cough cough
YOU said it wasn't enough! You said you were still alone, even though they accepted you!
What do you REALLY believe?!

...It WASN'T enough.
I needed friends.
Do you want to be human, or do you just want to stop being alone?
You could find acceptance by hiding who you are, but would you be happy?
I found people who understood what I really was, and cared BECAUSE they understood.
I don't think they even realize how incredible their capacity for love is - even for something like me.
There are people who will care about who you really are.
How will you find each other if you hide from the world?
KABOOM
You're lucky, "Doctor."
You didn't quite manage to back me into a corner.
You have no idea what you nearly unleashed.

What?!
WHAM
SSSS
You TWISTED me.

You warped these creatures against their nature!
How-?
This is too much power!
It's happening again.
AGAIN?!
HEY!
WHIP
WHUD
first now.
I am not so easily misused.
I will deal with him.
Pardon me, my lady-
But he has been harming MY forest.
I would prefer if you allowed ME to render judgment

Gleicann?
So this is your domain?
Yes. I am the spirit of this forest.
I see
He has used my power to corrupt your realm.
I am afraid so.
I apologize.
Kendal...
What, exactly, is talking right now?
...
The damage is extensive. He has inflicted many unhealthy and unsustainable mutations on the creatures who call me home.
I understand
They're just animals! They were never the point!
He has used me to harm much I hold dear.
It is only right that I should cast judgment.
I understand your anger.
But I suggest your time may be better spent otherwise.
I am this forest and nothing more -
While I believe you may have other priorities that require your attention.

Very well.
I will leave his fate to you.
What...?

ALINUA!
Oh! Hey.
Are you all right? What WAS that?!
And could you reproduce it in controlled conditions?
What?
Erin, not now!
So you are the one who made me so fearsome.
It is only right that I play my role for you.
No - wait! We can discuss this-
There's really no need for this-
I could simply relocate, you don't have to-!
FALST!
Don't just let this opportunity slip away!
Only I can give you what you want!
He's just a nature spirit-
STOP HIM!
I'm a monster, remember?
SNAP

Was it really never going to work?
Was he just lying to me?
Well...
Your THEORY was sound.
It could have worked... temporarily.
But no matter how carefully you wove the enchantment, your body would quickly reject it.
Ferin are much sturdier than the average human, and that extends to magic resistance.
Getting the transformation to manifest would require a lot more power than it would for a human, and trying to make it permanent would likely just make you very sick.
...I'm sorry.
Don't be.
It was a stupid idea anyway.

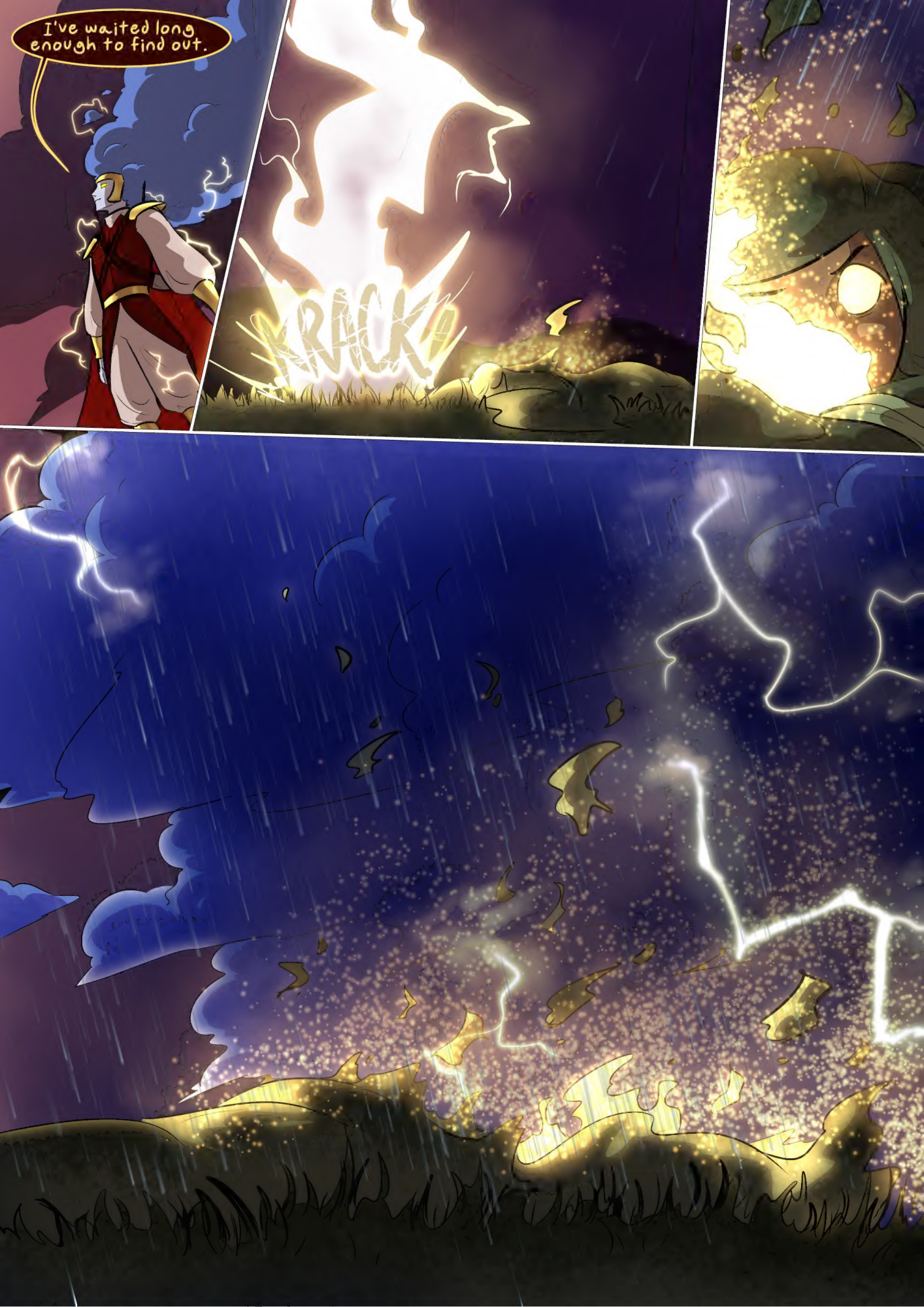
If you want my help next time, just ask. No need to steal from me.
"Next time?"
Listen, did you forget why all this happened?
I attacked YOU! I got you dragged into that doctor guy's plan! This is MY fault!
That's very debatable.
But what ISN'T up for debate is that if you hadn't gotten rid of that spelleater chimera, that fight would have gone MUCH worse for us.
As far as I'm concerned, we attacked you unprovoked and you saved the day anyway.
We OWE you.
You guys okay? Any injuries?
Just a little bruised, don't worry. Any lingering effects from your... outburst?
No, I feel fine.
Then can you PLEASE explain how you did that??
I was unconscious, Erin! I don't KNOW how I did it!
Hey.

Without the doctor, creating chimeras, these woods will probably become much safer.
Are you going to stay here?
If they're safer, more people will be coming through.
That's no good for me.
I'll probably be moving on soon.
Well, we're going to be traveling east for a while.
Until you figure out where you want to settle down...
Do you want to come with us?
Sure.

KRRMB...
SHAAA
K-THOOM
You are not welcome here.

You have been banished from these shores, Tynan.
Would you violate your exile?
Invite the wrath of every god on the continent?!
KRACK
You are NOT WELCOME in my lands!

LEAVE. NOW!
All talk.
Always just talk.
THUD
Only one of you could ever really back it up.
But from what I hear, he's gone.
I wonder how you'll manage without him?
PLIP
PLIT
SKFF


I've waited long enough to find out.
KRACK